Castlemaine Naturalist

May 2023

Vol. 48.4 #519

Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Dusky Moorhen training day
photo by Noel Young

Diversity of our local huntsman spiders

Our speaker at the April meeting was Ben Kurek from the Entomological Society of Victoria who addressed the meeting via zoom. Ben describes himself as "an amateur arachnologist, aspiring taxonomist, and nature lover specialising in Sparassidae of Australia". He is currently working on a book about the huntsman spiders (Sparassidae) of Australia which he hopes to have published by the end of the year.

Ben started his talk with an overview of spider taxonomy starting with the Phylum Arthropoda and moving down through Class Arachnida which includes Orders such as scorpions (Scorpiones), Opiliones (harvestmen or daddy longlegs), Pseudoscorpiones (pseudoscorpions), Acari (mites and ticks) and Araneae (spiders) amongst others.

Spiders are Arthropods that have four pairs of legs, usually four pairs of eyes although some have fewer, two main body segments (abdomen and cephalothorax combining head and thorax) and fangs used to capture prey. There is a good general description of spiders at https://ento.csiro.au/education/allies/araneae.html Within the Araneae Order there are two major groups both of which are found in Australia.

The Mygalomorphs, often referred to as 'Primitive spiders' is the smaller group which includes species such as the Funnelwebs and Mouse Spiders. They have prominent downward pointing fangs.

The larger group is the Araneomorphs or 'Modern spiders' that are characterised by having fangs that move laterally in a pincer-like movement. All spiders have claws at the end of their legs that enable them to move and grip to most surfaces. Unlike insects which have compound eyes, spider eyes are simple consisting of a single eye structure. The size of the eye is probably important in determining their visual ability with relatively larger eyes providing better vision. The eye arrangement is an important diagnostic feature.

The huntsman spiders are included in the Araneomorphae group. Many of this group are quite large with a leg-span up to 100mm. They generally have long legs relative to their body size which extend laterally giving a somewhat crab-like appearance. They occupy a variety of habitats including grassland, rocky areas and in forests where they hide in fallen timber, bark or holes in trees. Most species are nocturnal.

Huntsman spiders are not web-builders. Instead they are an ambush predator, waiting motionless until prey comes within range then pouncing and capturing it. Around houses they will often take advantage of lights which will attract insects to within their capture range. Most huntsman are solitary however one species, the Social Huntsman *Delena cancerides*, will live in colonies with other individuals of the same species.

There are at least seven species of huntsman found in our area however there may be more that are yet to be reported from our region. Ben showed photos and gave us a brief description of most of them. This table lists those that have been reported with records on iNaturalist or Atlas of Living Australia.

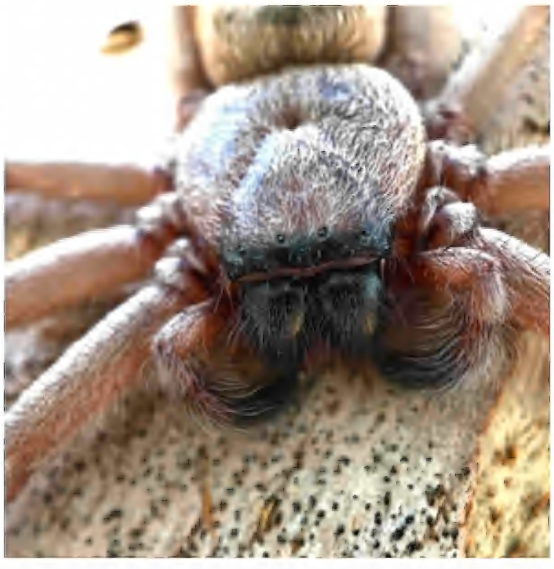
Scientific Name	**Common Name**	**Notes**
Neosparassus diana	Diana's Badge Huntsman	Badge huntsmen are distinguished by markings under the abdomen.
Neosparassus calligaster	Beautiful Badge Huntsman	
Isopodella frenchii	French's Huntsman	
Isopodella victorialis	Victorian Huntsman	
Isopeda montana	Mountain Huntsman	
Delena cancerides	Social Huntsman	Lives in groups in sheltered locations.
Delena melanochelis	Ribbon-back Huntsman	
Holconia colberti		

At the end of his talk Ben discussed how dangerous these spiders are for humans. They are not medically significant as humans are generally not severely affected by the venom, however some people may have an anaphylactic reaction following a bite. There may also be a local reaction to the bite along with the risk of bacterial infection so it is best not to get bitten.

If you have a huntsman in the house and want to relocate it, place a container over the top then gently slide a piece of paper between the wall and the container to trap the spider. You can then safely take it outside and release it.

Thank you Ben for a great talk. **Euan Moore**

Idiommata sp., Brush-footed Trapdoor Spider is a Mygalomorph spider. Note the parallel downward pointing fangs characteristic of this group.



Delena cancerides, Social Huntsman is an Araneomorph. The fangs of these species are more flexible with lateral movement. This spider lives in small colonies.

Isopedella victorialis, Victorian Huntsman (left) and *Neosparassus diana*, Diana's Badge Huntsman are two species that we are likely to find around Castlemaine.

- all photos by Ben Kurek/ iNaturalist

CFNC-ANOS excursion 15 April 2023

Cathrine Harboe-Ree

The weather was kind to the thirty folk who went on the excursion on Saturday 15 April looking for autumn-flowering orchids. This was a combined Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club and Australasian Native Orchid Society outing, and people came from as far away as Swan Hill to see what species could be found. The heavy rain that was threatening thankfully held off until the scheduled finishing time.

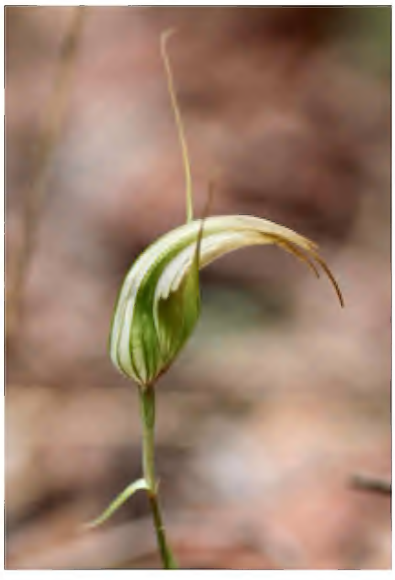
The excursion was in typical goldfields forest in the Maldon Historic Reserve; that is, forest that was cleared in the past for gold-mining activity and topsoil that has been disturbed or lost. [photo above by Jennifer Rolland]

The most common native orchid species we found – by a big margin – was *Eriochilus cucullata*, or Parsons Bands. Although many of the flowers seemed small this year, perhaps because of the dry summer, they were sprinkled throughout the forest in generous numbers. There has been some discussion about the possibility of there being more than one species of *Eriochilus* occurring in Victoria, but, until this is clarified, it is being called *E. cucullata* in this area. Photo – Cathrine Harboe-Ree

The second most common orchid species found was *Pterostylis rubescens*, which has previously been called *Pterostylis* sp. aff. *parviflora* (Northern Victoria). In the Castlemaine district the common name for this species is Inland Red-tip Greenhood. According to VicFlora, this species is widespread across northern Victoria on slopes and ridges in drier open forests and woodlands on well-drained soils. Photo (left) - Cathrine Harboe-Ree

Pterostylis ampliata and *Corunastylis occidua* were present, although in smaller numbers. We also saw a number of colonies of rosettes and at least one *Pterostylis smaragdyna* or *melagramma* in bud.

Pterostylis ampliata, or Large Autumn Greenhood, was formerly known as *Pterostylis revoluta*. *P. ampliata* occurs either as a flowering plant or a rosette; both were present.



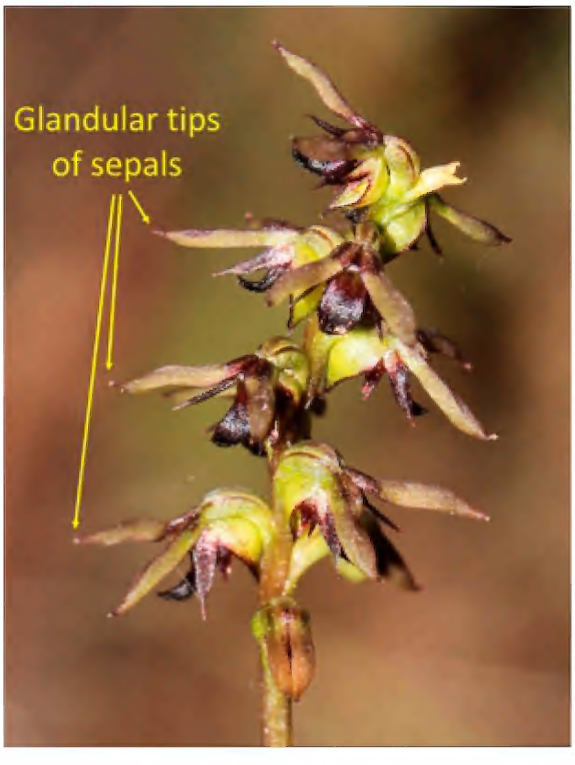
Pterostylis ampliata. (right) Photo: Cathrine Harboe-Ree

The following information about the *Corunastylis occidua* we found has been provided by Russell Stanley:

During the excursion and there were a few varied opinions about this species' identity. My opinion was that it was certainly the Dark Midge Orchid *Corunastylis occidua* ms*.

Corunastylis occidua (formerly known as *Corunastylis* sp. aff. *rufa* and Corunastylis species 'inland') is a commonly encountered species through northern Victoria. Colouration varies considerably from almost entirely red/brown, through various shades of green and red/brown to light green with a red/brown labellum.

The labellum is usually dark in colour with a rounded (sometimes bluntly pointed), up-curved tip. It has a smooth or slightly toothed edge. The lateral sepals are usually angled downward or horizontally oriented (or occasionally upturned to keep us on our toes). The lateral sepals have minutely glandular tips that can vary in colour (often whitish or brownish). Petals are pointed and directed outwards and downwards, and the dorsal sepal which is often obscured from view by the labellum also points downwards.



Corunastylis occidua -
Photo: Russell Stanley

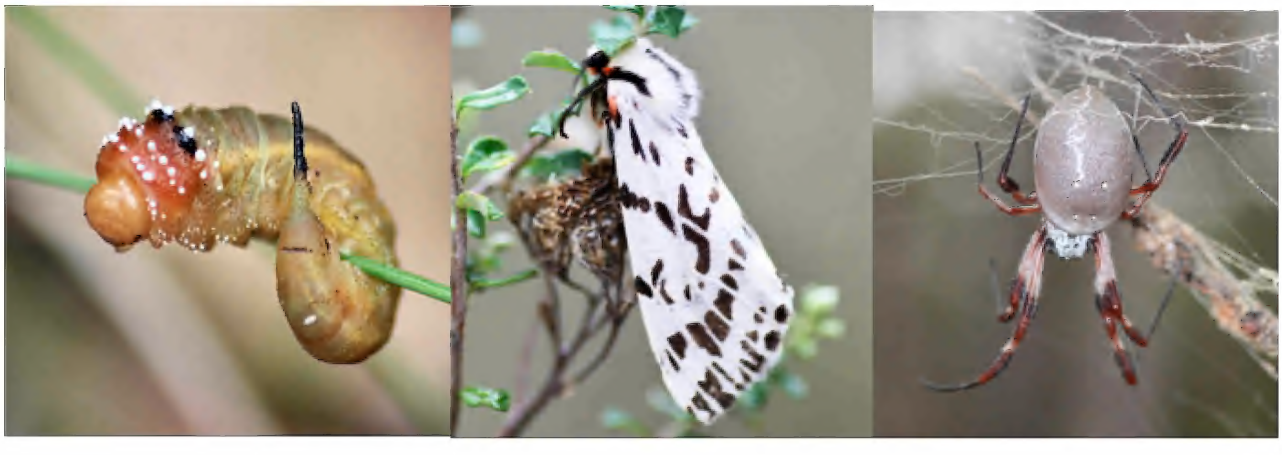
There was a view that the species might have been the Variable Midge Orchid *Corunastylis archeri*, but that species has a broader and quite sharply upturned labellum apex that is fringed by hairs and is more likely to be encountered in southern Victoria. It also lacks glandular sepal tips. There are several old records of *Corunastylis archeri* for both Maldon and Maryborough. How many of these records are accurately aligned to modern taxonomy and how many are misidentifications is unknown.

* 'ms' is an abbreviation of 'manuscript', which means that the name is generally accepted as being correct and is being used in publications but has not yet been formally adopted. Thus, VicFlora does not yet list *C. occidua* but it is listed in the most recent orchid guides.

We thought that we had found four species, but Peter Little found a fifth when he looked at his photos after the excursion. In the same area the *Corunastylis occidua* were found there was at least one *Corunastylis ciliata,* the revealing element being the fringes, or cilia, on the labellum:

Right: *Corunastylis ciliata*. Photo: Peter Little

There was a great deal to see apart from the orchids, including Sawfly larvae (a member of the Pterygophorinae subfamily), a Black-and-white Tiger Moth (*Ardices glatignyi*) and many spiders, including this Australian Golden Orb Spider (*Trichonephila edulis*). Of plants in flower, we saw Flame and Cranberry Heath (*Stenanthera conostephioides* and *Styphelia humifusa*), as well as Spreading Wattle (*Acacia genistifolia*).



May observations (Wildlife magazine 1946)

George Broadway

Before Ern Perkins passed away, he and I were engaged in placing labels on plants in Kaweka Wildflower Park. We had tried to label at least one of each plant type in the park. Over the last few years I have been carrying on alone but there is a lot of work remaining to be done - someone will have to take over from me. Ern and I had experimented with different methods of labelling, trying to find something which would be both legible and reasonably permanent. We have I believe found a method which seems to work reasonably well, which I have now been using for a few years. Most annoyingly it seems that when I label a plant it immediately dies, so I now have a collection of labels with no plant.

I now place the label at some distance from the plant so that it doesn't realize that it has been labelled. One such label is for a Mistletoe. The original specimen died and I have been looking for a replacement. Some time ago Ern wrote in an article in the Newsletter that host trees were able to defend themselves against mistletoe attack by cutting off the supply of water to the relevant branch, or even discarding that branch, mistletoe and all. I had thought that I would have no trouble finding another suitable mistletoe specimen for this spare label as I remembered that in the higher area of the park there were several specimens not far from the ground. However when I went searching for a suitable specimen I found that many of those mistletoes are either dead or have been cast off by the host. At one time there were three different Mistletoes in Kaweka but now only one, although the other two were parasitic

on Acacias. So it seems that Ern's predictions were correct. Most surviving mistletoes are high up in trees near Hargraves St, so the label will be rather distant.

The readers' specimens this month of May 1946 were very disappointing; they were all specimens which had been previously submitted and described.

INSECTS

Sassafras: Young black Field Cricket. Field Crickets and Mole Crickets are distinct but both belong to the same family, *Gryllidae.* (The Field Cricket *Teleogryllus commodus* is injurious to pastures and crops in S.E. Australia. The Mole Crickets, *Gryllotalpidae* have forelegs greatly modified for digging, they make deep permanent burrows and may be heard stridulating at the entrance especially after rain.)

Hopetoun: A rounded type of Rhinoceros Beetle, *Borboceras,* a first-rate scavenger.

Stawell: Caterpillar of the Drinker Moth, *Pinara.* Remarkably well camouflaged.

Nyah: Grey Gum Weevil or Elephant Beetle. One of the larger weevils which attack gum trees.

Nhill: Sap-sucking Soldier Bug, variety of Harlequin Bug. Also Cowangie

Donvale: Vine Hawk Moth caterpillar.

Ashburton: Tree cricket, frequently sent in by readers. Was often found in woodsheds when most people had wood fires, so not so often seen these days.

SPIDERS

Red Hill and Somers: Spiny Spider, *Gasteracantha minax.* May be seen in our bush at present.

Black Rock: One of the orb spinners *Epeira.* It went silvery when bottled because the body is hairy and retains air which reflected the light when the spider was immersed in liquid.

Brighton: An Attid or jumping spider, usually of small size and brightly coloured. It can jump considerable distances but it has been noted that it always fixes a thread of silk before it springs, so that should it jump into space it can always climb back.

Nyah: Orchard or Bird-dropping spider. Often appears in this column.

Geelong: Grey Wolf Spider, *Lycosa ramosa.* Ground-dwelling and carries its young on its back for some time. Lives in burrows and is often mistaken for a Trapdoor Spider, which it is not.

BOTANICAL

Beecroft (NSW): A Slime Fungus. One of the most primitive living things, at one time claimed by both Botanists and Zoologists. Now placed in the group *Myxomycetes.*

Frankston: Lattice or Basket Fungus, *Clathrus.* Is related to the Puff-balls and begins as a solid ball of jelly below ground. When ripe it breaks the surface, the outer ball bursts , and from inside springs the large resilient rubbery basket-work lattice which caries the spores away with it as it bounces over the ground with the breeze.

Sunshine: The weed is Bladder Ketmia, a member of the Hibiscus family.

AscotVale: A noxious weed from South America, Pampas Lily of the Valley, *Salpichroa rhomboidea.*

Birds of Sutton Grange April 2023

Nigel Harland

Superb Fairy-wren	White-browed Scrubwren	Australian Magpie
Australian Raven	Laughing Kookaburra	Yellow-tufted Honeyeater
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Long-billed Corella	Crimson Rosella
Welcome Swallow	Red Wattlebird	Galah
Striated Pardalote	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	

Fryerstown Grevillea search, 22nd April 2023

Euan Moore

This was an additional activity included in our program to follow up on the presentation and excursion lead by Georgie Custance back in February.

We had nine starters and fine weather for the afternoon at Lower Kangaroo Track. This area was higher on Fryers Ridge and to the south of the location we visited on the original excursion. After spraying our boots with Phytoclean anti-fungicide we set off up the hill. It did not take us long to find extensive patches of the Fryerstown Grevillea, mainly on the side or within 50m of the road that had not been subject to fuel reduction burns. In all we found more than 200 plants. Several members of the group logged sightings using the ProofSafe app on their phones and should now be sufficiently familiar with the process to be able to log occurrences when wandering the bush.

We noted that most plants were near the crest of the ridge, mainly north facing, and on the upper western facing slopes. We did not find any plants on the lower slopes of the ridge.

We will repeat this activity next month on a section of Porcupine Ridge – Saturday May 20th, meet at the Octopus at 1.30pm. For more information email Euan

All welcome.

New book on the birds of the Castlemaine region

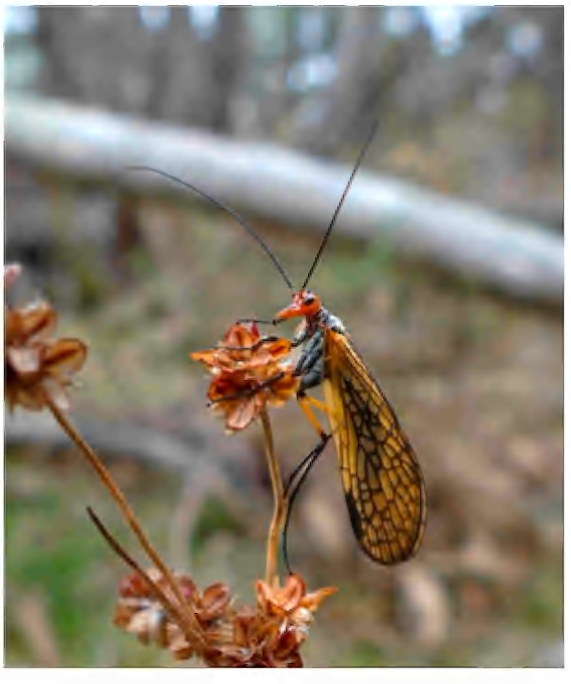
To commemorate the launch of BirdLife Castlemaine five years ago, Chris Timewell has written an annotated guide to the 215 bird species documented during the 2018 calendar year from throughout the area covered by the branch. Bird records have been compiled from Birdata, eBird, Natural Newstead and other sources. Coming in at 100 pages, the book summarises relevant information for each species detected during 2018 including patterns of distribution and seasonality, maximum flock sizes, breeding records, interactions with other species, feeding behaviour and other points of note - all tailored to the area covered by the BirdLife Castlemaine branch (which covers all the area typically covered by the Castlemaine Field Naturalist Club but also extends further to the west beyond Maryborough and to the south as far as Woodend and Daylesford). It also has a checklist of all birds known to occur in the local area - including those species not detected during 2018. Wonderful images from local bird photographer Kerrie Jennings are interspersed throughout.

It is offered here to CFNC members at a cost recovery price of $20, with an extra $4 for postage if required. To order your copy, contact Chris at for details on payment and delivery.

Observations

Mez Woodward

I have been watching these tiny magpie moth eggs after seeing females laying on the senecio a week or so back. Goodness knows why they chose a wet and windy morning to hatch today..



Above: *Cotesia glomerata* Cabbage white parasitoid wasp and pupae

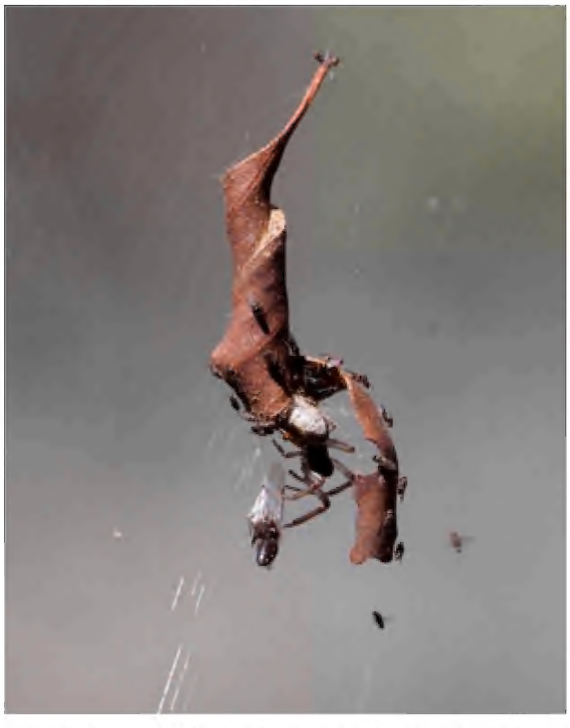
Right: *Chorista australis* scorpion fly

Peter Turner

Bardi Moth (aka Rain Moth) *Trichina atripalpis*. Found in middle of the road outside our house. 6 cm long. It was alive but perhaps only just. Placed it on the trunk of a tree - had gone by the next day.

Females scatter thousands of eggs around Eucalypts. Larvae live in the ground, feeding on the roots of trees. Moths emerge after rain from large brown cases that can be seen sticking out of the ground.

Noel Young



Leaf Curl spider attending to prey while a swarm of fruit flies? live dangerously. Railway Dam.
Right: Golden Orb Weaver female, with tiny male above her waiting his chance. Spring Gully.

From the Committee

Our committee has recently responded to two environmental issues and is updating our publications:

Draft Mount Alexander Shire Council Climate Change Strategy – the committee submitted a detailed response supporting the council's initiative to formulate a climate change strategy. We stressed the need for flood prevention strategies to minimise damage to the Botanical Gardens and Campbells Creek. We also recommended to Council that it better coordinates its own activities and departments for more effective delivery of positive outcomes to the natural environment, as well as working effectively with other relevant agencies such as Coliban Water and the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (formerly DELWP).

Duck shooting season – members were urged to submit individual responses to the Parliamentary inquiry into native bird shooting.

Publications – we are taking stock of our publications and determining a priority list for the next ones to be revised. This process is also feeding into a revamp of the Explore page on our website. We'll let you know when the new page is up.

Protecting our environment

Due to concern about spreading plant pathogens in our soils we are implementing new footwear cleaning practices on all of our excursions and field trips. We are asking everybody to clean their shoes or boots thoroughly before leaving home (scrub off dirt and remove seeds). On arrival at our excursion site we will be

spraying the soles of our boots with Phytoclean. Again, we will brush dirt etc off our boots before leaving a site.

Phytoclean is a disinfectant cleaner specially designed for the control of *Phytophthora cinnamomi*, or cinnamon fungus, which is a microscopic, soil-borne disease-causing organism that attacks and destroys plant root systems, causing plants to die through lack of water and nutrients. Grevilleas in particular are susceptible to this disease.

Phytoclean is used by other naturalist groups, such as the Australasian Native Orchid Society. If you are leading an excursion and do not have a supply of Phtytoclean, please contact a committee member and you will be provided with some.

COMING EVENTS

May Meeting: Friday 12th Uniting Church hall

Coliban Water Biodiversity Strategy

Coliban Water aims 'to protect the upper section of the Coliban River and its long-term water supply, while boosting habitat connectivity, sustainable land use practices, and building cultural and lifestyle value across the region.'

Lisa Cox, Environmental Specialist - Projects with Coliban Water, will talk about Coliban Water's Biodiversity Benefits Strategy and the land it manages.

May excursion, Saturday 13th : McCay Reservoir.

Kylie McLennan from Coliban Water will lead a field trip to McCay Reservoir, providing a rare opportunity to see this site, which is not open to the public. The reservoir, which is the source of Castlemaine's water, consists of approximately 180ha and a variety of vegetation classes and quality, therefore providing some unique diversity. Kylie will show us the reserve and explain how water is transferred from Malmsbury Reservoir via the Coliban Main Channel and Poverty Gully Channel tunnel, via a channel through a hill.

Meet: 1.30 pm at the Octopus (Duke St, opposite the Castle Motel).

Bring: Water, afternoon tea, sturdy shoes and wet weather gear.

Boot hygiene: due to concern about spreading plant pathogens in our soils, please clean your boots thoroughly before leaving home (scrub off dirt and remove seeds). On arrival at our first excursion site, we will be spraying the soles of our boots with Phytoclean. Again, we will brush dirt etc. off our boots before leaving a site.

The Field Trip will be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. All welcome.

ROADSIDE CLEAN-UP: Monday 15th May, 9am.

Join us to help keep our stretch of the Pyrenees Highway clean!

Meet near Tait's Decorative Iron, corner of Willy Milly Rd and Pyrenees Highway, Castlemaine at 9am. Garbage bags and safety vests supplied. Wear sturdy footwear and bring your own gloves and water.

Please contact Geoff Harris if you can help with the clean-up.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club

PROGRAM

General meetings (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church Hall, Lyttleton St. at 7.30pm or by Zoom June to August.

If you have observations to report at the meeting and photo(s) to illustrate your report, please email them to Euan Moore by noon on the day of the meeting.

Excursions (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite the Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise.

Fri May 12 Meeting 7.30pm. Speaker: Lisa Cox "Colib an Water's biodiversity program"

Sat May 13 Excursion 1.30pm. Leader: Kylie McLennan (Colib an Water), McCay Reservoir.

Mon May 15 Roadside clean-up 9am.

Sat May 20 *Grevillea obtecta* search 1.30pm. Leader: Euan Moore.

Fri June 9 Meeting 7.30pm (by Zoom). Speaker: Louise Saunders "Botanical art – inspiring wildlife conservation"

Sat June 10 Excursion 1.30pm. Fungi search, Wombat forest.

Fri July 14 Meeting 7.30pm (by Zoom). Speaker: Matt West (Melb Uni Zoology)

"Protecting frogs from Chytrid fungus"

Visitors are welcome at club activities

Club website (Web master: Ron Wescott) - www.castlemainefieldnaturalists.org.au

Castlemaine Naturalist - email newsletter material to: newsletter.cfnc@gmail.com

*Deadline for the June edition is 26th of May.

Subscriptions for 2023 (now due, forms and payment details on the club website)
Ordinary membership: Single $35, Family $50
Pensioner or student: Single $25, Family $30
Subscription includes the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

2023 Committee

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